

## Evidence-Base: Leadership

### Leadership and Team Effectiveness

Leadership is defined by McGrath (p.365) as a responsibility “to do, or get done, whatever is not adequately handled for the group needs”.<sup>3</sup> Others have defined it as the means by which designated leaders or leaders in action impact team effectiveness before, during, and after a task.<sup>1</sup> This is done by ensuring that team members are seeking information, planning team duties, coordinating team actions, resolving conflict amongst themselves, and providing coaching and feedback. More specifically, it is the duty of those entrusted with leadership responsibilities to ensure team actions like monitoring and information sharing take place. Leaders do this by performing two key behaviors: managing resources and facilitating team actions.<sup>4</sup>

How important is leadership in promoting team effectiveness? Leadership has been identified by team researchers as an important piece in the teamwork skills puzzle.<sup>1</sup> Salas and colleagues (p. 8-9) point out that leaders “impact team effectiveness not by handing down solutions to teams, but rather by facilitating team problem-solving through cognitive processes (e.g., shared mental models), coordination processes (e.g., environmental monitoring; resource management), and the team’s collective motivation and behaviors (e.g., performance expectations).<sup>1,4,5</sup>

### Leadership and Teams

Organizational researchers have long focused on the value of teams as a unit of task work with leadership serving as a means for improving employee performance and attitudes.<sup>6</sup> Some researchers have taken on the added burden of assessing the role of leaders and leadership strategies in order to best facilitate not only individual, but also team outcomes.<sup>4</sup> Fleishman and colleagues provided a taxonomy of task-based leader skills that can be used to demonstrate the role of leaders when facilitating team actions.<sup>7</sup> Researchers identified skills such as planning, organizing, problem-solving, facilitating and supporting the team action process. These skills were identified as the key behaviors that leaders need to take to ensure teams perform effectively and attain their desired outcomes.

Later, Morgeson expanded upon Fleishman’s taxonomy by grouping the key leadership skills into one of three categories: monitoring, diagnosis, and intervention.<sup>8</sup> In this model, monitoring refers to the continual monitoring of the team and environmental cues. Diagnosis refers to using information to make decisions and draw up action plans. Intervention can include team establishment, motivation, and team member development. DeChurch and Marks combined taxonomies to develop a theory of the role leadership in action teams.<sup>9</sup> Two key leader behaviors were identified as having a vital impact on simulated fighter pilot performance: information management (e.g., resource management) and communication (e.g., facilitation). These researchers pointed out that leaders have the greatest impact on team performance if they manage information and human resources by delegating tasks and supplying information to their team members. They also illustrated the point that leaders must support their teams by communicating with them and holding information sessions to reinforce the coordinated actions to be taken. Teams with leaders that performed these behaviors reported significantly greater sharedness in mental models, committed fewer errors in flight, and performed better than teams with leaders who did not perform these behaviors. This is just one example of several leadership skills impacting team effectiveness.<sup>10,11</sup>

Leaders have an impact on team effectiveness through ensuring team actions are understood by all, changes in information are shared by team members, and that teams and team members have the resources necessary to perform the task required. Leaders must ensure that information sharing,

monitoring, helping, and other team actions are taking place by reinforcing shared mental models and modeling team actions for team members. Leaders must provide team members with the appropriate human and material resources (e.g., team members with proper skills) to perform. Facilitating team actions aids in the development of shared mental models, while managing resources ensures that teams can be adaptable when necessary.

In summary the evidence suggests that effective team leaders:

- Are responsible for ensuring that team members are sharing information, monitoring situational cues, resolving conflicts, and helping each other when needed
- Manage resources to ensure teams performance
- Facilitate team actions by communicating through informal information exchange sessions
- Develop norms for information sharing
- Ensure team members are aware of situational changes to plans

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